

Remarks at Georgetown Waterfront Park

July 1, 2014

Well, hello, everybody. Have a seat, have a seat. It's hot. [*Laughter*] It's hot out. Anthony, take off your coat, man. [*Laughter*] It is hot, and Team U.S.A. takes the pitch in a couple hours, so we've got to get down to business. We don't have time for a lot of small talk. Am I right, Mr. Mayor? We've got to get going.

Behind me is one of the busiest bridges in Washington. And with the Fourth of July on Friday—also Malia's birthday, for those of you who are interested; she will be 16; it's a little, little worrisome—I would note that this bridge is named for the man who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner," Francis Scott Key.

Three years ago, I came here to this very spot, to the Key Bridge, to talk about how two of the five major bridges connecting DC to Virginia—including this one—were rated "structurally deficient." And with almost 120,000 vehicles crossing these bridges every day, I said it was important to fix them.

And today, that's exactly what we're doing. So, soon, construction workers will be on the job making the Key Bridge safer for commuters and for families and even for Members of Congress to cross. [*Laughter*] This is made possible by something called the Highway Trust Fund, which Congress established back in the 1950s and which helps States repair and rebuild our infrastructure all across the country. It's an example of what can happen when Washington just functions the way it was supposed to.

Back then, you had Eisenhower, a Republican President; over time, you would have Democratic Presidents, Democratic and Republican Members of Congress all recognizing, building bridges and roads and levees and ports and airports—that none of that is a partisan issue. That's making sure that America continues to progress.

Now, here is the problem. Here is the reason we're here in the heat. If this Congress does not act by the end of the summer, the Highway Trust Fund will run out. Won't be any money there. All told, nearly 700,000 jobs could be at risk next year. That would be like Congress threatening to lay off the entire population of Denver or Seattle or Boston. That's a lot of people. It would be a bad idea. Right now there are more than a hundred thousand active projects across the country where workers are paving roads and rebuilding bridges and modernizing our transit systems. And soon, States may have to choose which projects to continue and which ones to put the brakes on because they're running out of money. Some have already done just that, just because they're worried that Congress will not get its act together in time.

Now, earlier this year, I put forward a plan not just to replenish the Highway Trust Fund, I put forward a plan to rebuild our transportation infrastructure across the country in a responsible way. And I want to thank Secretary Anthony Foxx, who is here today, for his hard work in putting this plan together. Because we are not spending enough on the things that help our economy grow, the things that help businesses move products, the thing that help workers get to the job, the things that help families get home to see their loved ones at night. We spend significantly less as a portion of our economy than China does, than Germany does, than just

about every other advanced country. They know something that I guess we don't, which is, that's the path to growth, that's the path to competitiveness.

So the plan we put together would support millions of jobs. It would give cities and States and private investors the certainty they need to plan ahead. It would help small businesses ship their goods faster, help parents get home to their kids faster. And it wouldn't add to the deficits, because we'd pay for it in part by closing tax loopholes for companies that are shipping their profits overseas to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. Seems like a sensible thing to do.

It's not crazy, it's not socialism. [Laughter] It's not the imperial Presidency or—[laughter]. No laws are broken. We're just building roads and bridges like we've been doing for the last, I don't know, 50, 100 years. But so far, House Republicans have refused to act on this idea. I haven't heard a good reason why they haven't acted. It's not like they've been busy with other stuff. [Laughter] No, seriously. [Laughter] I mean, they're not doing anything. Why don't they do this?

Now, Republican obstruction is not just some abstract political stunt, it has real and direct consequences for middle class families all across the country.

We went through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, we've climbed back. Since then, we've created 9.4 million new jobs over the past 51 months. Corporate profits are up, stock market is up, housing is improving. Unemployment is down. The deficits have been cut in half. We're making progress, but we still have a situation where those at the top are doing as well as ever, but middle class families all across the country are still struggling to get by. There are people who are working hard, they believe in the American Dream; it feels sometimes like the system is rigged against them.

And they have good reason to think that way. So far this year, Republicans in Congress have blocked or voted down every serious idea to strengthen the middle class. Not ideas that are unique to me—they're not. This isn't Obama bridge. [Laughter] It's Key's Bridge. But the Republicans have said no to raising the minimum wage, they've said no to fair pay, they've said no to extending unemployment insurance for over 3 million Americans looking for a new job.

And this obstruction keeps the system rigged for those who are doing fine at the very top. It prevents us from helping more middle class families. And as long as they insist on taking no action whatsoever that will help anybody, I'm going to keep on taking actions on my own that can help the middle class, like the actions I've already taken to speed up construction projects and attract new manufacturing jobs and lift workers' wages and help students pay off their student loans.

And they criticized me for this. Boehner sued me for this. [Laughter] And I told him, I'd rather do things with you, pass some laws, make sure the Highway Trust Fund is funded so we don't lay off hundreds of thousands of workers. It's not that hard. Middle class families can't wait for Republicans in Congress to do stuff. So sue me. [Laughter] As long as they're doing nothing, I'm not going to apologize for trying to do something.

And look, I just want to be clear, Republicans in Congress, they're patriots, they love their country, they love their families. They just have a flawed theory of the economy that they can't seem to get past. They believe that all we should be doing is giving more tax breaks to those at the top, eliminating regulations that stop big banks or polluters from doing what they want, cut the safety net from people trying to work their way into the middle class, and then somehow the economy is going to get stronger, and jobs and prosperity trickle down to everybody. That's their worldview. I'm sure they sincerely believe it. It's just not accurate. It does not work.

We know from our history our economy doesn't grow from the top down, it grows from the middle out. We do better when you've got some construction workers on the job. They then go to a restaurant, and they buy a new car. That means the workers there start doing better. Everybody does better. And we could be doing so much more if Republicans in Congress were less interested in stacking the deck in favor of those at the top or trying to score political points or purposely trying to gridlock Washington and just tried to get some things done to grow the economy for everybody. We could do so much more if we just rallied around an economic patriotism, a sense that our job is to get things done as one Nation and as one people.

Economic patriotism would say that instead of protecting corporations that are shipping jobs overseas, let's make sure they're paying their fair share of taxes, let's reward American workers and businesses that hire them. Let's put people to work rebuilding America. Let's invest in manufacturing so the next generation of good manufacturing jobs are right here, made in the U.S.A. That'd be something to celebrate on the Fourth of July.

Economic patriotism says that instead of stacking the deck in the favor of folks just at the top, let's harness the talents and ingenuity of every American and give every child access to quality education and make sure that if your job was stamped obsolete or shipped overseas, you're going to get retrained for an even better job.

Economic patriotism says that instead of making it tougher for middle class families to get ahead, let's reward hard work for every American. Let's make sure women earn pay that's equal to their efforts. Let's make sure families can make ends meet if their child gets sick and they need to take a day off. Let's make sure no American who works full time ever has to live in poverty.

Let's tell everybody they're worth something. No matter who you are, no matter what you look like, where you come from, who you love, if you work hard, if you're responsible, you can make it here in America. That's what this country was founded on, that idea. That's why I ran for this office.

I think sometimes about what we could be accomplishing, what we could have accomplished this past year, what we could have accomplished the year before that. And typically, what gets reported on is just the politics: "Well, you know, they're not doing this because they don't want to give Obama a victory," or "Oh, well, we don't want to do this right now because maybe the midterm election is coming up," and, "Oh, well, what's happening with the polls?" People don't care about that. People just want to see some results. And objectively, if you look at the agenda I'm putting forward, the things that we're trying to get done like just fixing bridges and roads, it really shouldn't be controversial. It hasn't been controversial in the past.

And so part of the reason that I'm going to be spending a lot of time over the next several weeks and months getting out there with ordinary folks is just to report to you, it's not as if I don't know that you could use some help. I know. It's not as if we don't have good plans to put more people back to work and raise their incomes and improve the quality of education. We know how to do it. That's not the reason it's not happening. It's not happening because of politics.

And the only folks that can fix that are going to be you, the American people and voters. We—sometimes in our culture right now, we just get cynical about stuff, and we just assume things can't change because nothing seems to change in this town. But that's not true. It can

change, as long as everybody gets activated, as long as people still feel hopeful and we don't fall prey to cynicism.

And so I just want everybody here to understand that as frustrating as it may be sometimes, as stuck as Congress may be sometimes, if the American people put pressure on this town to actually get something done and everybody is looking at some commonsense agenda items that we should be able to do because Democrats and Republicans were able to do them in the past, we can grow our economy, we can lift people's incomes, we can make sure that people who are fighting hard can get into the middle class and stay there. But it's going to take you. It's going to take you. This is not going to happen on its own. And I'm confident, if that's what we do, if all of you are fighting alongside me every single day instead of just giving up on this place, then we're going to make America better than ever. That's a promise.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless America. Go Team U.S.A.! Let's build some bridges!

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:22 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Vincent C. Gray of the District of Columbia.

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